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Assistant Librarians

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THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS
(Section of the Library Association)

HON. EDITOR W. B. STEVENSON

Hornsey Public Libraries

Announcements

STUDENTS are reminded that application for the Revision Courses in classification and cataloguing must reach Mrs. S. W. Martin, Carnegie Library, Herne Hill Road, S.E.24, by 20th February, after which date no application will be considered. Under present conditions students would help considerably by sending in their applications as early as possible. These Revision Courses are intended only for students who have previously sat for the Intermediate Examination. In no circumstances will any other application be considered.



The McColvin Report: A Criticism¹

Claire Madden

OUTLINE of Mr. McColvin's Proposed Scheme.—Mr. McColvin proposes that at the head of our Library system there should be a central advisory body to guide and co-ordinate the service on a national basis, to enforce national minimum standards, and to provide certain special services of a national or regional character. The whole of Great Britain is to be divided into 92 administrative units for library purposes: each of these units covers a population of from about 300,000 to 1,500,000. The Unit is to be governed by a Joint Committee composed of representatives from existing authorities in its area, and is to be administered by a Unit Chief Librarian and an administrative Headquarters staff. The Unit Chief would have complete control over all the libraries in the area—Main Library, Central Libraries, Town Branches, etc. All

¹ Summary of paper read at a meeting of the Greater London Division of the A.A.L., November 29th, 1942.

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existing independent libraries would become branches of the Unit, as would also the branches of an existing large system which, under the scheme, "will become branches of the Unit and will not remain branches of the component towns" (p. 139).

Criticism.—The case for a Central Advisory Body on the lines suggested, and to carry out the functions specified, is sound. Such a body is essential if we are to have a satisfactory service. But a division of the country into 92 areas, each of which would be under the virtual control of one man, would be disastrous both to the service and the profession.

No one could argue the case for local control more effectively than has Mr. McColvin (pp. 115–116) but it would be difficult to devise a scheme which would be a more effective negation of local control, or better calculated to diminish local interest to vanishing point, than the scheme detailed by Mr. McColvin. What vestiges of local control would remain to an authority swallowed up under the scheme if the Librarian in charge of its town library is under the direct control of a Chief Librarian (and perhaps a whole hierarchy of lesser officials) at a headquarters 40 or 50 miles away, who is responsible only to a joint committee on which that authority has but one or two representatives? It is an abuse of language to describe as "local" a service administered over such large areas and from such distances as Mr. McColvin suggests; his proposals should be studied in the light of the case for local control which he has himself made out, and we should ask ourselves whether these concrete proposals stand or fall when tested by the general principles which he himself has laid down.

Apart from the question of local control viewed from its value and importance in a democratic system of government, what would be the effect of Mr. McColvin's proposals on the future work and status of librarians and on the service provided for the public?

Many men and women of considerable ability, and possessed of qualifications the acquisition of which has cost considerable time, money, and labour, are found ready as things are to accept a comparatively very low rate of pay and to work long and awkward hours because of the compensations which they find in working at what is for them their ideal job. As assistants they persevere through years of often dreary routine work in the hope that sometime they will have charge of a building where they can incorporate their own pet improvements, and, above all, have the opportunity of creating a library which, however small, would be a complete whole, representative and well-balanced in its stock, and built up with an eye on the special needs of the locality. Every keen assistant looks forward to the day when he can follow up his perusal of reviews by ordering the books he thinks desirable. These compensations will have gone with the wind if Mr. McColvin's scheme comes into operation. What is

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the independent librarian, actual or potential, offered in return? "By way of compensation," says Mr. McColvin kindly, "he will be relieved of much of the worry and responsibility he had previously borne . . ." (p. 193). Strange as it may seem to Mr. McColvin, some people like responsibility; to them it is a stimulant and not a cause of worry. The local librarian will certainly not get much compensation by way of increased salary since the proposed salary scales do not err on the generous side. No longer will he be able to build up his stock as his heart desires; his books will be served out to him like boxes of soap. They will be selected and bought by an official at headquarters rejoicing in the style of Chief of the Accessions Department (pp. 139, 170). This officer is supposed to consult the local librarian, but it would be unwise to pin too many hopes on that. Both stocks and staffs will be pooled (p. 135) and whole sections of the local librarian's carefully chosen and well-balanced stock may be spirited off in a day to some other library (p. 138).

The Chief of the Accessions Department will be buying books for a population of anything from 300,000 to 1,500,000; what likelihood is there that libraries will have special attention paid to their local needs under such a system? Book-buying on such a large scale loses its fascination and becomes a laborious task. Some idea of the results can be foreseen from what booksellers tell us of the present practice of some county librarians who send in orders such as "Send so many thousand reprints at 3s. 6d." This, it may be feared, is what we are likely to get on an intensified scale if all the book-selection and purchase throughout the country is placed on the shoulders of 92 Accessions Chiefs. Moreover, can any librarian contemplate with satisfaction the standardization of book supply which will result if all the book-selection throughout one large region is concentrated in the hands of one man or woman? Nor are the drawbacks of such a system confined to book-selection; serious inefficiency and irritating delay will result if a distant superintendent of buildings must be consulted before the local librarian can replace necessary fittings or carry out urgent repairs.

But if the local man does not get much fun out of being a librarian, neither will the Unit Chief Librarian. He will not be a librarian at all; he will be simply an administrator. The same applies to his headquarters staff. Under Mr. McColvin's scheme the cream of the profession will be skimmed off for administrative posts in the higher professional grades and thus withdrawn from the real work of librarianship which, as Mr. McColvin rightly insists, is personal service to individuals. This will be left to the lesser lights on the General Professional Scale. How this will work is illustrated by the case of C (p. 192) who, as soon as she gets her diploma in child psychology, retires to an administrative post as chief

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children's librarian where presumably she will never come in direct contact with a juvenile borrower again. Are the people of this country under such a scheme likely to get a better or a worse service than they have now?

Summary.—If Mr. McColvin's scheme comes into operation, local authorities will be deprived of all effective control; the vast majority of professionals (most of whom Mr. McColvin hopes would be graduates) would remain all their lives on the General Professional Scale with far too little responsibility to make their work interesting; the remainder would be forced into administrative work (when they would have preferred to remain librarians) in order to obtain anything like decent salaries, and, in the higher professional grades, will be remote from contact with the public and (in many cases) will have far too much responsibility for one individual adequately to cope with. None (with the possible exception of the unit chief) would receive salaries in any way comparable with what persons of similar education and responsibilities would obtain in other professions or departments of local government. The real fascination of librarianship would be lost to all.

Mr. McColvin's Basic Error.—Mr. McColvin's basic mistake is his adoption of the hierarchical principle *together with* advocacy of large administrative areas. The hierarchical principle works well in local systems of the average size we have to-day; it would result in nothing but stultification and inefficiency if applied over areas as large as Mr. McColvin's 92 units. It would be well to consider the following observations on Parallelism versus Hierarchy extracted from the Interim Report of Medical Planning Research (*Lancet*, Nov. 21).

"The pull between the technician and the administrator is strikingly illustrated in the civil service. In the Ministry of Health the doctors and engineers have remained ultimately subordinate to the pure administrators. Similarly, in municipal hospitals, clinicians are subordinate to administrators, though often these administrators have previously been clinicians. For this reason, the best technicians have often refused to serve in such organizations, and those who have served have become frustrated and disillusioned. We think that the answer to this problem is to be found in a study of parallelism and hierarchy.

"Parallel organizations are those in which authority (or a great part of it) is divided among many persons of equal rank. Hierarchical organizations are those in which authority is concentrated in one pair of hands, below which are others, having again others below them. In practice neither exists in pure form; even the most parallel organizations have some measure of hierarchy and vice versa.

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"Broadly speaking the more automatic the job, the greater must be the degree of hierarchy. . . . Similarly the more creative a job, the greater must be the degree of autonomy, which can only be obtained by parallelism. . . . Most of the practice of medicine is still the application of individual judgment to the individual case. And as long as this is so, parallelism as a dominant feature is desirable. . . .

"Some of the inherent advantages and disadvantages of the two forms of organization will now be considered in turn:

"The Parallel Organization"

"(i) Opportunities of occupying senior positions, with a large measure of responsibility, are greatly increased. The chances of getting such a position at a relatively early age are also greatly increased. As a result, the presence of one able man in an organization does not discourage others from entering it. Responsibility is achieved before age has sapped initiative and converted enthusiasm into disgruntlement with superiors. And a wide range of talent have the chance of liberal and varied expression. . . .

"(ii) In organizations where members are required to display individual responsibility to others, it is particularly important that they should not be denied that responsibility themselves. . . .

"(iii) By the parallel system of organization the dangers of bad appointments are minimized.

"(iv) In all human communities there are squabbles, bickering, and ill-feeling. Among equals these are less damaging to others, and less likely to lead to warping of character, than among superiors and inferiors.

"(v) The largest disadvantage of a parallel organization is a certain difficulty in pure administration. Thus it may be difficult to arrive at a policy decision, and, once it has been arrived at, it may remain distasteful to some of the parallel seniors; their refusal to implement it is rendered easier by the absence of hierarchical control. This disadvantage may be reduced by placing administrative responsibility on one member of the parallel organization, while keeping his status equal with his fellows. His directions must then be translated to his fellows by tactful persuasion rather than forcible coercion. . . .

"The Hierarchical Organization"

"(i) In a salaried organization it is usually cheaper to pay one man a very high salary and proportionately lower salaries as one goes down the hierarchy, than to pay a number of men reasonably high but equal salaries.

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" (ii) If one is fortunate enough to have at the head of one's hierarchy an administrative genius, who also has wide human sympathies, he may produce a machine which works more happily and more smoothly than the best parallel organization. But such men of genius are rare. . . . If multiple local heads are required parallelism has a better chance.

" (iii) A mediocre hierarchical head—the usual situation—is in an unhappy position. He is responsible for all the activities of his subordinates, the great majority of which he cannot supervise. As a result he tends to sacrifice initiative to safety. . . .

" (iv) His powerful position *vis-à-vis* his subordinates tends to produce in him dictatorial traits—a dislike of criticism, self-satisfaction, and parochialism.

" (v) The senior workers in a hierarchy suffer from all the disadvantages which are avoided in a parallel system. Years of subservience turn their minds away from their work; they may preserve social equilibrium by concentrating on hobbies, sports, or pastimes, or they may become embittered misanthropes, or scheming intriguers, assiduously seeking out influential people and canvassing committee members.

" The vivid contrast between the parallel and the hierarchical systems is well seen in medicine. . . . In the municipal and national medical services . . . hierarchies have been the rule, and as a result second-rate rather than first-rate personnel has been the general rule. The parallel system makes the administrator equal with, and not superior to, the technical worker . . . the hierarchical system limits the opportunities of advancement of the technician and confines the prizes to the administrator. . . . Technical skill should receive at least equal recompense with administrative ability. . . .

" We have then no hesitation in recommending that in a national medical service parallelism should be the dominant feature of the technical side. . . . We suggest a steady drawing together of maximum and minimum salaries with parallelism on each level. . . . Thus where there are a number of heads of departments they should be equal in salary and status. If there is one executive head of a group . . . he should be *primus inter pares*; his salary should not differ from his colleagues and the reward for his additional responsibility should be his additional authority. The ranges on both administrative and technical sides should be the same. . . .

" Every large organization has a nerve centre and a number of peripheral units. . . . In each peripheral unit the principle of parallelism should be applied. Its administrative head should be equal in salary and status with the headquarters officer exercising general control. Peripheral officers in charge of large sections under the peripheral administrative head should have similar salaries and status. . . . Peripheral devolution

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of authority, particularly a large degree of financial authority, is essential if work is to be done smoothly and quickly, and there should be room for peripheral experimentation. . . . Interchange of staff between headquarters and the periphery . . . should be continuous and should carry with it no stigma."

Librarianship, like medicine, is personal service to individuals and these arguments apply with equal force to schemes of organization for both professions. There is no case for making the administrator in librarianship superior in status or salary to the technician (the local librarian) any more than there is in medicine.

Constructive Proposals.—It is generally agreed that many existing authorities are far too small. For various reasons it seems improbable:

(a) that all existing authorities will be superseded by all-purpose regional authorities; or,

(b) that special *ad hoc* authorities will be set up for a particular service (such as that suggested by Mr. McColvin).

On the other hand it is probable:

(c) that the very small authorities will disappear as independent units, but that libraries will continue as a local service in such as remain.

(d) that regional authorities may be superimposed, over such local authorities as remain, for certain services of which libraries might be one.

If (a) eventuates all local government will go with the local authorities and borough librarians will disappear with their boroughs. It would in effect mean nationalization of all services, which is extremely undesirable and highly improbable.

If, however, libraries are administered by large-area authorities such as (b) or (d) it should be possible, by the adoption of the parallel principle, to avoid the most undesirable features of Mr. McColvin's hierarchical scheme. If the parallel principle were adopted the unit chief librarian would be *primus inter pares* in relation to the chiefs of previously independent authorities, rather than their superior officer in the strict sense. Local librarians would continue to be chief librarians in their own locality and not become branch librarians; they would continue to be responsible to their local authority; they would retain their present independence in respect of book-selection and purchase, superintendence and administration of their own buildings, branches, etc.; they would be equal in status with the unit chief and also in salary (in proportion to his and their respective local populations). The unit chief's authority would be of an advisory and co-ordinating character rather than of a dictatorial nature. Books would be available throughout the unit but would remain the property of their particular library. Co-ordination could be achieved


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by the two committees suggested by Mr. McColvin (p. 128)—the Joint Authorities Committee and the Librarians Consultative Committee. The latter would be a permanent institution (not temporary as Mr. McColvin suggests) and innovations affecting the whole of the unit should be discussed by this committee before being put before the Joint Authorities Committee. The Joint Authorities Committee would make recommendations to the local authorities, with whom, however, final decisions should lie *except* in matters where national standards were laid down by the proposed Central Advisory Body. By such modifications we could have all the advantages of Mr. McColvin's scheme without its disadvantages.

If on the other hand libraries continue as a purely local service as in (c) above, it should still be possible to provide a satisfactory library service given certain essential pre-requisites, viz.:

- (1) National rating;
- (2) General interavailability of tickets;
- (3) A National Advisory Body (as suggested by Mr. McColvin) to enforce national minimum standards of service, salary, and training; to make grants to deserving areas or for special purposes; to carry out national or non-local projects, such as central cataloguing and bibliography, regional reference libraries, etc.;
- (4) Emancipation of County Libraries from control by Education Committees;
- (5) Transference of all areas below the minimum population for an independent administrative unit to the county;
- (6) Release of all areas above this minimum population from county control for library purposes.

Salaries.—Librarians and assistants will be much more likely to get adequate salaries if they demand the application to their department of the National Scales put forward by NALGO for professional, technical, and administrative staffs in all departments. Any special scale for librarians is likely, on account of absence of commercial competition, to be much lower than scales for professions in other departments, e.g. finance, engineering, etc. It is very unfortunate that such an extremely low scale (particularly one containing sex discrimination) should have been suggested by a responsible librarian. If it were adopted we should soon lose our hardly won claim to professional status.



Fiction in 1942

W. B. Stevenson

FEW novelists this year have been entirely unaffected by the war : one cannot write a contemporary novel without war, or the years before the war, as a background or as a theme. The one attempt to ignore the war completely—Rachel Ferguson's *Evenfield*—is a complete failure. Our best-sellers chatter brightly about country houses full of evacuees; the strong silent Frankau heroes have drifted into uniform or a War Ministry; while the thriller writers roam Occupied Europe or invent still another secret weapon.

Upton Sinclair continues his chronicle of the pre-war years with *Dragon's teeth* (Werner Laurie, 10s. 6d.), a book in which Lanny Budd travels more extensively than ever, selling pictures, endlessly talking (and interfering in) politics, seeing everything, assessing each trend in that crazy Europe of 1933-38. His friends turn Nazi or Communist, he negotiates trickily with Goering and Goebbels; he provides Sir Basil Zaharoff with a few occult experiences. The last exciting chapters see him rescuing his friend Julius from a concentration camp. It is difficult to see how this vast subject could have been tackled better. Sinclair writes with immense gusto, and his enormous political knowledge is well displayed; this is his major work, and I look forward with pleasure to further volumes. In extreme contrast is Frederic Prokosch's *The Skies of Europe* (Chatto, 10s. 6d.), though the background of each novel is very similar. Prokosch's hero lives in the same Europe, but his world is blurred in outline; the figures of violence, the storm troopers, the revolutionaries move as in a dream. The Russian girl with whom the hero falls in love seems to symbolize the cosmopolitanism and worm-in-the-bud rottenness of Paris in 1930-40: idylls in Tyrol alternate with macabre episodes in Munich. Here is a novel almost supercharged with poetry, brilliant, morbid, and of great originality.

In contrast with Sinclair and Prokosch are two writers with lesser themes, set in the England of the 'twenties. Hugh McGraw in *Lads of the village* (Michael Joseph, 8s. 6d.) turns again to his suburban Chelling, to tell a story of adolescents, factory life, picture-houses, and dance-halls. A charming book this, authentic in dialogue, brisk in its humour. Mr. H. B. Creswell must be unique, for he combines architecture and novel writing, and his factories (see the *Architectural Review*) seem to be as soundly constructed as his novels. *Grig* (Faber, 7s. 6d.) is a full-length portrait, in the form of a private diary, of that sturdy master-builder and fine old character John Grigblay. It is a story of little things perhaps—of stained-

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glass windows and the building of gas-holders; but written with such charm that there will be few who can resist it. Here again we meet Alf Bloggs and Spinlove the architect, Johnny Rasper the jerry-builder, and others familiar from the *Honeywood* series. This is a book perfect in its own inimitable manner, full of technical detail, yet clear enough even to a layman; in two words, a minor masterpiece.

Two novels with a stranger background are worthy of our attention. The first, Mulk Raj Anand's *The Sword and the sickle* (Cape, 9s. 6d.), continues the story of Sepoy Lal Singh, home from the 1914-18 war in his native India. He tries vainly to settle down, but usury and oppression become too much for him; he becomes involved in political agitation; the book ends with Lal in a concentration camp, and his wife, Maya, awaiting their first child. Here is India as Dr. Anand, an Indian, sees it: those who wish to understand the Indian people, their faith, their simplicity, and their striving for a better life, will gain more insight from this novel than from many a blue-book. Lourdes in 1840 is the subject of Franz Werfel's *The Song of Bernadette* (Hamish Hamilton, 10s. 6d.), a novel epic in proportions. Bernadette Soubirous, the central character, is the Lady of Lourdes. Werfel reconstructs the dramatic scene of the miracles for us in detail, characters throng the pages, and a whole city comes to life. The book is remarkable for its sincerity, and a worthy tribute to the city that gave the author refuge in the dark days of July 1940.

The Fall of France has brought forth many stories; few more interesting, however, than a work of fiction, Nevil Shute's *Pied piper* (Heinemann, 8s. 6d.). John Howard, a man of seventy, is caught in Southern France in June 1940, and undertakes to bring two children back to England. This story of his journey, and his arrival with six children (collected *en route*), in England, is dramatic and told with a matter-of-factness that is completely convincing. The narrative reminds one of Maugham in its simplicity, its capacity to evoke, rather than describe, emotion or terror. A most interesting and satisfying novel. Nigel Balchin's *Darkness falls from the air* (Collins, 8s. 6d.) is a story with the London "blitz" for a background, concerned with a temporary civil servant, Bill Sarrat, his wife Marcia, and a hysterical poet, Stephen, as the other side of the triangle. I liked this book, with its clipped dialogue, its satire on ministerial circumlocution, and its sincerity. J. B. Priestley's *The Blackout in Gretley* (Heinemann, 8s. 6d.) is a thriller, but on the Buchan rather than the Horler recipe. Much better written than most of its kind, Priestley gives us a good story of sabotage and spying in a North-country town. Humphrey Nayland, his Canadian hero, meets some queer characters, bashes the fifth columnists, and liquidates the spies; while the author delivers himself of

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some characteristic Priestleyisms on war, blackout, pubs, and the beastliness of hotel cooking in England.

Gerald Kersh, in *Nine lives of Bill Nelson* (Heinemann, 7s. 6d.) continues his stories of the Guards. Bill Nelson was killed; the book is formed of nine glimpses of incidents in his life, from nine of his comrades. I've never been in a barracks, or known a guardsman, but Mr. Kersh's soldiers are convincing enough; their talk is racy and satisfying; the comparison with Kipling is inevitable, but Kersh survives it. The R.A.F. may have found their novelist in James Aldridge, whose *Signed with their honour* (Michael Joseph, 9s. 6d.) has a fine and appropriate title for a book on the desperate campaigns of Greece and Crete: a campaign in which dilapidated Gladiators fought the best 'planes of the Luftwaffe. The author is a journalist, and his story, compact in narrative, plainly written, is packed with incidents probably drawn from personal experience. The love story is a failure, but the Hemingway manner is exactly suited to the story. The flying episodes, the retreats and escapes, are magnificently done, and the book as a whole outstanding and memorable. Storm Jameson's *The Fort* (Cassel, 6s.), though with a setting of the Battle of France, is a story of thought rather than action. Two English officers, four Frenchmen, and a German are isolated in a farmhouse during the great battle. They talk, and the book sums up the faith of each nationality, the Führer-worship of the Nazi, the fatalism of the French, the optimism and hope of the English. China once again is the scene of Pearl Buck's new novel, *Dragon seed* (Macmillan, 9s.). A long book, a story of the first years of Japanese aggression, it is a family chronicle; a chronicle of misery, starvation, rape, and death, a worthy successor to the author's previous books on China, and a fine contribution to understanding a great people. Not for the squeamish.

American authors have not produced any war novels as yet, and the time-lag in publication has sent us a few notable pre-war novels from the United States. Foremost of them is J. P. Marquand's *H. M. Pulham, Esq.* (Hale, 10s. 6d.), a book recently filmed, and inevitably simplified and distorted. I don't think Marquand's Pulham is the typical American citizen of the film, he is rather a man frustrated, bound and gagged by the civilization that produced him. This is an admirable book, clear and delightful in style, subtle in characterization. Marquand is quite merciless with the characters he dislikes, and there is an undercurrent of satire throughout the book. Perhaps not quite so likable as *Wickford Point* or *The Late George Apley*, it is yet the most notable and distinguished novel of the year. I. J. Kapstein's *Something of a hero* (Hamish Hamilton, 10s. 6d.) is a chronicle of life in a small American town. By means of a series of episodes, each taking place on successive Independence Days,

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we see the development of the town and the careers of its inhabitants; the method is most successful. Without pretension, Kapstein sums up the events and movements of a generation of Americans. James T. Farrell's *Ellen Rogers* (Routledge, 10s. 6d.) is a story of Chicago in which the author at last leaves the O'Neill family, and applies his realist style to the tale of an unhappy love affair. Ed Lanson is a cad, but Farrell makes his charm apparent through his love for clichés, poetry, and assorted women. Ellen, too, is a good portrait of a rather shiftless individual. Told throughout in that flat, almost monotonous dialogue the author has made peculiarly his own, the book is grim in its realism, but convincing as a whole. Jerome Weidman's *I'll never go there any more* (Heinemann, 8s. 6d.) is his most considerable work yet. The story is told by a young accountant, the central character being Max Maggio, an ex-gangster who, in spite of his ruthless appetite for money and women, yet retains a strong sense of family honour. To say that all the characters are queer would be an understatement—they are almost outlandish, they live a life without hope, without illusion. The book is savage in its cynicism, yet there is a sort of frustrated idealism half-submerged in all of its people. This, as the American libraries would say, "is not for conservative communities," but it is, all the same, the best book of its kind since *Appointment in Samarra*.

The heroine of G. R. Stewart's *Storm* (Hutchinson, 8s. 6d.) is a young cyclone, cheerfully nicknamed "Maria" by the meteorologist who first notices it on his weather map. It says much for the author's eye for detail and enthusiasm for his subject that the book grips one throughout. Each incident, each human being, seems to be used by the forces of nature: a cracked electric switch-box, the joist of timber left carelessly in the road, a wandering pig; all fit into the scheme of disaster. Here is a most enjoyable and unusual book. Another American novel is Carson McCullers' *Reflections in a golden eye* (Cresset Press, 6s.). A story of three men, two women—and a horse, it has a touch of D. H. Lawrence, a soupçon of Kraft-Ebbing even, but an originality and a power all its own. Miss McCullers is a young writer: this is only her second novel. I look forward to seeing more of her work, and am glad to hear that the same publisher will produce her first book, *The Heart is a lonely hunter*, next year. From the queer we go to the frankly "wacky"—an expressive American word—that applies well to Ludwig Bemelmans' *Hotel Splendide* (Hamish Hamilton, 7s. 6d.). Those who know what to expect from the author's previous books will not be disappointed, for this cavalcade of head-waiters, valets, and *plongeurs* is the most delightful collection of queers ever assembled even by such masters as Thurber or Benchley. Bemelmans has a sparkling wit, a keen sense of character, and an apt power of description. This is the funniest book of the year, and the author's scribbled drawings are an

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amusing addition to the book. Jules Romain's *Salsette discovers America* (Hutchinson, 7s. 6d.) is a tribute to American democracy cast in semi-fictional form. It may not make up for two books of *Men of good-will* which will not be published here till the end of the war, but it gives quite a new and humorous aspect of Romain's genius. Salsette admires everything with enthusiasm—frigidaires, Hart Schaffner and Marx suits, and the delightful legs of the New York women—but his seeming *naïveté* does not conceal a shrewd eye for the American scene and an interesting tribute to the American way of life.

Hugh Walpole's last book is of the type he describes as "a macabre"—books that he seemed to write as a holiday from the Herries family. *The Killer and the slain* (Macmillan, 8s. 6d.) is a story of transference of character—from "murderee" to murderer. John Ozias Talbot (notice the initials) kills J. O. Tunstall and gradually finds himself turning from an ascetic bookman into a riotous but artistic debauché. This was the sort of thing in which Walpole revelled, and his interest communicates itself to the reader; the accumulating horror is conveyed by subtle touches such as Talbot's discovery that he can draw; the atmosphere is sinister and convincing, the tragic conclusion inevitable. Not a major Walpole, perhaps, but a good craftsmanlike novel. The new Simenon translation (which appears as inexorably as the seasons) is of unusual interest. In *The Man who watched the trains pass by* (Routledge, 8s. 6d.) we have a psychopathical study of Kees Poppinga, a normal man, employed by a ship-chandler—normal but for his desire to travel. He gratifies that desire by committing a robbery, follows it by murder, and travels to Paris, chased by the police. His vanity is touched by the police's abortive efforts, and he helps them in a series of anonymous letters. He ends in an asylum, convinced that only he knows the truth about the Poppinga case. A queer but interesting book, proof of the author's great versatility. Another character study in a quite different *genre* is J. T. C. Pembers' *Not me, sir* (Cape, 8s. 6d.), a school story about an unusual boy. The school is quite a typical small preparatory school, but the boy seems a misfit. The changes in his character as each term passes, the transference of his affection from mother to father, are conveyed with deep insight. There is none of the sentimentality of the "beautiful friendship" type: the book is finely conceived and well written.

John Steinbeck's *The Moon is down* (Heinemann, 5s.) brings us back to war again; but a war generalized rather than specific. It is a story of Nazi invasion of a town, possibly in Norway. It describes the invasion, the growth of individual and collective resistance, the impact of Nazidom on a free democracy. It is impeccable in style and in sentiment. Yet I found it unconvincing. *The Grapes of wrath* was written from experience

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in the heat of passion: *The Moon is down* is written from second-hand experience—and alas, the author writes as a spectator. Compare it, for instance, with *The Colossus of Maroussi* (Secker & Warburg, 8s. 6d.). Here is modern Greece, and its impact on an American writer. You may not like Henry Miller's style: it is as brutal as a runaway express, it pounds, it vibrates. Yet the book is rather terrifying, almost overwhelming in its torrent of emotion, but completely sincere and derived from experience. This is the first book of Miller's to be published in England, and introduces a writer of genius.

There have been fewer volumes of short stories this year, yet the quality has been high. I cannot believe that Michael Zoschenko is the only Muscovite with a sense of humour; he is the only one in English, however, and we must welcome his new book, *The Wonderful dog* (Methuen, 3s. 6d.). These are delightful stories. The title story, in which the police dog in quest of a stolen coat gradually smells out all the inhabitants of a block of flats, makes them confess to "wrecking activities," and then finishes off with the policeman, is characteristic. A charming book—Gogol *redivivus*. Woodrow Wyatt, who edits *English story, third series* (Collins, 8s. 6d.) contributes a preface dismissing the domination of left-wing writers before the war, and identifying his own group of writers with a new vision of some sort. I cannot see it: the only characteristic of this group of stories is gloom, and it is difficult to identify a "movement" including Sitwell and Treece, Elizabeth Bowen and Nicholas Moore. There are some good stories here, however, notably the contributions from Furbank, Maclaren-Ross, and Sylvia Townsend Warner. A new Faulkner volume of short stories, *Go down, Moses* (Chatto, 9s.) is a series linked in theme—the deep South. Those mannerisms of the writer, occasionally tiresome in his novels, are not so prominent in these stories. *Bear* and *The Fire and the hearth* are outstanding examples of Faulkner's peculiar talent. *Penguin New Writing* (Penguin books, 9d.) turns with numbers 13 and 14 to a quarterly appearance. The excellence of the contents is maintained and a sheaf of photogravure illustrations has been added. Jack Marlowe starts an interesting series of *Readers' notebooks* in No. 13, while No. 14 includes good material by Henry Green and William Sansom. The most notable effort, however, is a brilliant essay on Aldous Huxley by Walter Allen—a compact and able summing up of this wayward writer.

New writing and Daylight (Hogarth Press, 7s. 6d.) combines two notable publications in one volume. The book provides a forum for young writers, and though they are of the "dominant left-wing" despised by Mr. Wyatt, the stories and essays are of a high standard. The emergence of new Greek and Czech writers is especially to be noted.

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Some good critical works wind up our survey of the year. Janko Lavrin's *An Introduction to the Russian novel* (Methuen, 6s.) is an excellent short survey of the subject. It does not, of course, supersede Mirsky's wider two volume survey, but as an introduction for the general reader it is admirable. The chapters on Pushkin, Tolstoy, and Lermontov are especially good, and the survey of Soviet fiction the best of its kind. E. M. Forster's *Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge University Press, 1s. 6d.) is the Rede lecture for 1941. A remarkable essay in interpretation this, familiar in style; by a writer with much in common with his subject. A unique enterprise has been completed by Howard Haycraft, whose *Murder for pleasure* (Peter Davies, 10s. 6d.) provides a complete survey of the English and American detective story, with a select bibliography and an evaluation of well over a hundred writers on both sides of the Atlantic. Here is a book invaluable to librarians; a reading of its pages will convert all the snooty who condemn all detective stories as "bloods," and will provide the careful with a good check list. Although the bias is towards the American writer, librarians will find that only two or three of the authors mentioned are unpublished in England.

Pride of place among critical works and reference books this year must go, however, to the Oxford University Press, and to James D. Hart, the editor, for *The Oxford companion to American literature* (Oxford University Press, 28s.). This, the latest addition to a fine series of reference books, is a *sine qua non* for all reference libraries, large and small. The arrangement is alphabetical: brief biographies of American authors, descriptions of outstanding works from 1578-1941, paragraphs on incidents of American history, make up the contents. This is in every way an outstanding work: test it how you may, it will seldom be found wanting. So many things, familiar to Americans, are puzzling to the English: references to such people as Paul Revere or the minutemen continually crop up in American novels and may prove obscure to the plain reader; seek in the *Oxford companion* and they will be found. Librarians will be pleased to see the sturdy binding and the fine paper of this book: it is imported from America, where economy paper and binding are apparently unknown.

A word in conclusion regarding this "authorized economy standard." Ninety per cent. of modern books are thin and miserable travesties of what a book should be. Many publishers have jettisoned everything in order to publish large editions: grey paper, muddy print, lamentable bindings are the result. Some few publishers, among them Faber, Cape, Chatto, Secker, and the Oxford Press, have combined economy with good taste. Their books, though thin, are pleasant to read and handle, and have a reasonable prospect of lasting.

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Children's Books, 1942

Ida A. Newman

"While the mind is sensitive to every impression give the child good books."
—ELIZABETH COATSWORTH.

CHILDREN'S tastes change with the times in exactly the same way as do adults'; and because of the great receptiveness of young minds, books must be always fresh and changeful for them. Children, especially sensitive and imaginative ones, love to dramatize themselves, and identify themselves with the hero or heroine however unfamiliar they may appear. Such identification has a definite influence on creating personality. Moral instruction and ideas have no place in children's reading, but stories in which the child can enter into another life, in which right triumphs gloriously over wrong, and which contain plenty of imaginative incident are the necessary properties of a good children's book.

When considering the books of the year for children of 9-14, the one which stands out as having these qualities to a very high degree is *The Boy who was afraid*, by Armstrong Sperry (Lane, 6s.). It is a fine adventure story, based on a legend of the South Seas, and tells how Mafatu, the son of a great Polynesian chief, sets out to overcome his fear of the sea. Vividly written, with all the colour and danger of the South Seas, every page creates picture and action. There are numbers of beautiful prose pictures: "Here the water was cool and green; The sunlight filtered from above in long oblique bands; Painted fish fled before him." For creating terror what could be more effective than Mafatu's meeting with the Octopus? Such appropriateness of words and meaning is rarely found in children's books.

Pictures of a very different, but equally well drawn, nature are to be found in *Runaway boy*, by M. Dixon (Faber, 7s. 6d.), which is a companion book to *King of the fiddles*. It tells the story of Shawn as a little boy of eight who sets out to find his father, Desmond O'Halloran, who has disappeared. He has many adventures, and finds many friends, but though only eight years old he is an individual character who leads the reader on to follow him in the search. His Irish homeland is drawn vividly and Shawn himself belongs to the Irish countryside and people. All the way through, the faery-twilight atmosphere, peculiar to Ireland and Irish stories, is beautifully created. But the characters live and are drawn with great understanding and in harmony with their background. With its living pictures of hills and valleys, this book is unique in the year's work.

The type of book to which the next three belong—*Vanishing island*, by E. Kyle (Davies, 7s. 6d.), *Rick afire*, by David Severn (Lane, 7s. 6d.), and M. E. Atkinson's *Challenge to adventure* (Lane, 7s. 6d.), is on the

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increase, but the appeal of such works is not as yet by any means universal. They undoubtedly appeal to the "strict nursery" type of children, but is it still doubtful whether such books will ever gain the great popularity of the full-blooded excitement stories that are avidly read by boys and girls alike. To many children, whose lives are not continually freshened by holidays away from home, or who have not had the advantage of the care of interested parents, whose sphere of life is centred round the local cinema, the fish-and-chip shop, and school, escape into unreality is a necessity. But in spite of the seeming limitations of these books their value is great because of their sincerity and attempt to show life through the eyes of children. *Vanishing island*, by E. Kyle (Davies, 7s. 6d.), is a story in the Ransome tradition. Peter and Margot from London spend their second holiday in Port Angus. This time they find that Islay Macleod, the tinker boy, has grown up and they must find new adventures alone. The prim and proper Miss Pamela Brown manages to catch measles and so doesn't accompany them on their stay with Mrs. Finucane, who lives on a small island where there are only a few houses, but which is in sight of the island of the adventures of the story—*Vanishing Island*. The story is full of adventure and mystery, and apart from an occasional remark about Lord Woolton and the butter ration, there is nothing about the war in it. *Rick afire*, by David Severn (Lane, 7s. 6d.), is again the story of two children from town holidaying at a farm in the country. Mystery is supplied by a lone camper in a wood, who has a beard and who is suspected of firing the rick. To modern sophisticated children such an event does not seem over-exciting, but in real life, to country children at least, a rick afire is quite an occasion, and the cause of some considerable excitement. The book is very carefully written, and the contrast between town and country children is brought out early in the book when Derek and Pamela are mystified as to the vagaries of a sow in farrow. The background of the countryside is well drawn, and the characters are natural and alive. *Challenge to adventure*, by M. E. Atkinson (Lane, 7s. 6d.), is of this same group, and tells of more adventures of the Lockett family. The style of this book is not as good as in previous works of the series, although there is plenty of excitement.

Susannah rides again, Muriel Dixon (Dent, 7s. 6d.). Here is another Susannah book—this time she spends a holiday in the Canadian lumber camps. There is a romantic fascination about this setting, and the excitement of "riding" the booms, and of life with the lumber men, are excellent material for an adventure story which the author handles well. Further interest is supplied by an obnoxious agent who tries to cut down Aunt Sassie's lovely pine trees, but the children prevent this disaster by their ingenuity.

(To be concluded)

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